

International Bible Lessons Commentary

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, July 13, 2014

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, July 13, 2014**, is from **1 Corinthians 8:1-13**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is usually posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

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1 Corinthians 8:1-13

(1 Corinthians 8:1) Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

In his letter to the Corinthians, the words translated from the Greek text within quotation marks seem to be Paul’s quotation from portions of the questions in the letter from the Corinthians to him (there are no quotation marks in the original Greek text: quotation marks were added by translators to help people understand the text). We do not have their complete question. The quotations were to help them remember the question they asked so they could apply Paul’s answers to the right question.

The Old Testament has a variety of food laws and restrictions that we often categorize as ceremonial laws. Neither Jewish nor Gentile Christians need to follow or obey the Old Testament ceremonial laws, but the moral law of God (expressed as love for God and others and in the Ten Commandments is still required of everyone). The moral laws revealed in the Old and New Testaments forbid the worship of idols and permit only the worship of the one true God revealed in the Bible. Among some of the Christians in Corinth, knowing these facts was puffing them up, making them feel superior to others in the church, and leading them to do things that bothered the conscience of some in the church that did not fully understand these facts. Therefore, Paul wrote that love builds up. Christians with superior knowledge need love so they will use their knowledge to seek what was best for those without understanding, perhaps even pray about how to teach them deeper spiritual truths from the Bible with loving kindness toward others.

(1 Corinthians 8:2) Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge;

Some seek to learn more and more for the love of learning only, instead of for the love of God supremely. Some seek to learn more and more, because they believe knowledge is power and knowledge will give them power over others, instead of seeking to learn more so God can trust them to use His power wisely according to His will in helping others. Some people claim to know more than others and expect them to do what they command. The scribes and Pharisees serve as examples of some who claimed to know something, far more than others, so much in fact that Jesus could not teach them anything. Such people as these do not have the necessary knowledge.

(1 Corinthians 8:3) but anyone who loves God is known by him.

To be known by God is the most necessary knowledge. Those God knows, and those who know God, love God. Their love of God leads them to love the truth of God: Jesus is the truth, the truth of God. Jesus preached about the importance of being known by God: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers’” (Matthew 7:21-23). Those who do the will of the Father will love God and others, and they will use their knowledge to build up others.

(1 Corinthians 8:4) Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.”

Though some places today do not have banquets to honor idols, such banquets were common in Corinth and other places in the days of Jesus and Paul. Such banquets are still common in many countries today, and many people have honored places for their idols in their dining rooms. Christians and Jews who believe the Bible know that idols do not really exist (Paul will later explain that demons and idols are related). Some in the Corinthian church said that it did not matter whether they ate food that had been offered to an idol or ate in a temple where the food had been offered to an idol, because they knew that idols did not really exist; however, their behavior bothered some in the church, so the church wrote for Paul’s opinion. Knowing the truth about the true God, however, was no reason for someone to eat food that had been offered to idols in a temple, and such behavior could actually mislead others. An idol can be formed from physical materials, but an idol can also exist as an idea in the mind. People have also made money, movie stars, politicians, and religious leaders into idols. Those who believe the Bible know that there is only one God: Who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(1 Corinthians 8:5) Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth--as in fact there are many gods and many lords--

What Paul wrote to the Corinthians is still true today. In some places shrines to various gods (idols) can be seen on street corners and in public parks, in public buildings and restaurants, and throughout some people's homes. Places of pilgrimage that honor gods (though perhaps not in a physical form or in a possible physical form hidden from the eyes of people other than the priests) still attract millions of people. Some false religions or philosophies have no god visible to human eyes, but their teachings lead people away from the true God. Some people follow the ideas of religious, philosophical, and political leaders with the unswerving devotion that should be given only to the true God; thus making these leaders into their "lords," who lead them away from the moral law of God.

(1 Corinthians 8:6) yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

The Bible teaches the truth about the true God. The Holy Spirit indwells Christians. The Holy Spirit will help Christians understand the Bible. The Holy Spirit will help teachers teach the Bible rightly. The Holy Spirit helps Christians love God and others wisely. The one true God includes the Person of the Father, and all things were created by the Father and we exist for the Father. The one true God includes the Person of the "one Lord, Jesus Christ;" the Father created all that exists through Jesus Christ, and we exist through Jesus Christ. Jesus was not created; He always existed as the Son of God, but He was later conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary. God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, deserve our love, loyalty, praise, and worship. Jesus and the Apostles used descriptions such as these in this verse to describe the nature, character, and personhood of the one true God; therefore, we need whole Bible to learn about God.

(1 Corinthians 8:7) It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Even today, some Christians do not understand these truths about idols and the true God; therefore, those with love for them who have this knowledge will try to build them up. Some of the new Christians in Corinth had not been freed from their fear of and their slavery to the worship of idols for very long, and when they ate some foods they felt guilty (though they really did not need to feel condemned), because they thought of these foods as having first been offered to an idol, which involved them in false worship and disloyalty to God. Paul wanted all sides to understand one another, and he especially wanted those with knowledge to consider the conscience of those with less understanding before they did something that was permitted but unnecessary.

(1 Corinthians 8:8) “Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

The pagans believed that they would derive blessings and power from eating food that had been offered to an idol. Paul and the Corinthian church knew that no physical food would bring anyone closer to God. Rather, in the New Testament church, believers prayed and fasted to draw closer to God and receive His guidance and power.

(1 Corinthians 8:9) But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

Christians have the liberty to ignore the Old Testament food restrictions, but that does not mean that all substances are good for food. Christians can eat meat that has been offered to an idol; but seeing Christians do so can mislead some who are spiritually weak back into the fear of and worship of idols. Therefore, out of love for those who were spiritually weak, Paul wanted mature Christians to consider how they used their freedoms because they might mislead others by doing what they wanted without consideration of others. This principle can be applied to other freedoms too.

(1 Corinthians 8:10) For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols?

For the mature Christian in Corinth or for the Christian who had studied more, eating food in a pagan temple might mean no more than eating food in a local cafe today. But, an immature Christian or infant in Christ might see a mature Christian eating food that had been offered to an idol and without understanding think it is appropriate to participate in the worship of idols as they eat food that had been sacrificed to idols. They would probably be misled into thinking that Christians can worship the God of the Bible, follow Jesus, and also worship idols without sin or any other problems. Their weak conscience was not yet strong enough to tell them that a believer should not worship the true God and also worship idols. Their weak conscience might even encourage them to do wrong and worship idols.

(1 Corinthians 8:11) So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed.

The knowledge of a mature Christian might lead them to behave without sin when eating food offered to an idol. However, their behavior and example might lead a weak believer into sin; so that a believer for whom Christ died is destroyed—destroyed by once again falling into slavery to sin and Satan. The weak believer does not know that the mature believer is not worshipping an idol when they see them eating food that has been offered to an idol, so they might think that they can grow in Christ if they sacrifice

to idols too. The demons associated with the idols can mislead them and destroy them, one for whom Christ died.

(1 Corinthians 8:12) But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Paul said misleading others into sin was a sin. Though we may not be doing something wrong according to our conscience or understanding of the Christian faith, we can wound the conscience of those who are spiritually weak and lead them into sin. When we sin against others, we sin against Jesus Christ.

(1 Corinthians 8:13) Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

Because Paul loved God and people more than food, he resolved to put God and people first and not eat foods that might lead someone to worship idols or into other sins. He would not do what might cause them to fall away from Christ and into sin. This was part of the necessary knowledge that Paul wanted all believers to possess. With the help of the Holy Spirit, Christians can rightly use their knowledge and love of God in the service of others inside and outside the church.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What are some of the characteristics of those who are puffed up by knowledge?
2. How might someone use their knowledge in love to build up others?
3. Why would you say that it is more important to be known by God than to know a lot of facts about God?
4. What beings exist in the spiritual realm that the Bible reveals to us?
5. How serious can it be if we use our freedom and sin against other Christians?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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